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ABSTRACT

An important influence on a presidential candidate's debating style, the "incumbency factor," has been largely ignored by researchers. An analysis of the argumentative style of incumbents, based on the 1976 and 1980 presidential debates, has isolated three distinguishing characteristics: (1) presidential incumbents tend to avoid extended debate with their opponents; (2) incumbents employ a declarative style of debating, tending to make assertions without evidence or analysis; and (3) incumbents focus on the status quo to the neglect of the future. The analysis also suggests that incumbents' debating styles manifest these qualities because the debate topics focus on their records, because incumbents try to capitalize on their "presidential" status, and because presidents have acquired a preference for arguing from their own authority. The argumentative style of incumbents has proven ineffective in presidential debates for at least three reasons. First, debating calls for well-developed arguments rather than a series of assertions backed with the ethos of the presidency. Second, much of the appeal of a campaign debate is rooted in its conflict. An incumbent who avoids direct debate is unlikely to impress his audience. Third, debates involving incumbents are likely to center on their past record rather than on their vision of the future. The analysis suggests that incumbents who ignore the differences in debating styles between incumbents and challengers do so at great risk to themselves. (RBW)

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ABSTRACT

INFLUENCES ON PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN DEBATING: THE INCUMBENCY FACTOR

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In contrast to the numerous studies on the effects of presidential debates, relatively little scholarship has been devoted to analyses of the candidates' argumentation. Such studies have cited several factors that influence the character of a presidential candidate's debating: the campaign context and candidates' election strategies, the formats of televised debates, and the abilities of the candidates.

This study identifies another important influence on a candidate's debating: the "incumbency factor." Based upon an examination of the debating of incumbent presidents in 1976 and 1980, this paper identifies three distinguishing characteristics of an incumbent's debating: 1) presidential incumbents tend to avoid extended debate with their opponents; 2) incumbents employ a declarative style of arguing; and 3) incumbents focus on the status quo to the neglect of the future. The debating of incumbents manifests these qualities because the debate questions posed by panelists focus on their records, because an incumbent labors to remind audiences of his status as a President, and because presidents have acquired a taste for arguing from authority which they are unwilling or unable to alter during a campaign debate.

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INFLUENCES ON PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN DEBATING:

THE INCUMBENCY FACTOR

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With the onset of the 1984 presidential campaign, the "debate issue" will soon re-emerge. As New York Times columnist Tom Wicker has noted, "debates and the 'debate issue' have become a standard feature of the media politics by which we now elect Presidents." Although not entirely pleased with this development, Wicker conceded that "debate news" dominated the 1980 campaign as early as June--a full five months before election day.[1]

President Ronald Reagan having virtually secured renomination as the Republican candidate in 1984, media attention will probably focus on whether he will debate. No less a politician than Richard Nixon has declared concerning the 1984 presidential general election: "There will be debates."[2] Like other chroniclers of political discourse, communication scholars can make informed guesses about whether an incumbent will choose to debate. Our training and critical focus, however, also allow us to address more significant questions: How do incumbents debate? Why do they debate in a particular manner? And with what effect?

Scholars of speech communication, political science, mass communication, and journalism have generated a growing body of research on presidential debating, but have devoted relatively less attention to the argumentation in the debates. With the exception of Lloyd Bitzer's book on the 1976 debates,[3] the major studies focus on campaign strategy, audience

impact, and press coverage. Even the most thorough study of political campaign debates approaches the topic from a primarily strategic viewpoint, including only incidental comments on the arguing done by candidates.[4] In reviewing three book-length studies of the 1976 presidential debates, a professor of public administration noted with astonishment that "all three books gave surprisingly little attention to systematic analysis of the actual content of the debates." Although such books typically include debate transcripts, "remarkably little consideration is given to the messages and patterns in those transcripts."[5]

To the extent that scholars have analyzed presidential debating,[6] they cite three influences on the character of the candidates' arguing: campaign contexts and strategies;[7] the formats of televised debates;[8] and the abilities and disabilities of the candidates as arguers.[9]

These factors appear to account for the differences in debating by John Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960, and by Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter in 1976. Yet they do not fully explain the striking incongruity between Carter's relatively effective debating in 1976 and his ineffective performance in 1980. Bitzer and Rueter provide persuasive evidence that Carter argued shrewdly, effectively, and often soundly in 1976: "Ford was less skilled than Carter in verbal confrontation. Carter was quicker in thought and expression, more creative, sharper in rebuttal, and more clever in the sense that he easily saw opportunities and usually knew how to use them to his purpose. These traits of thought and expression cannot be invented or taught to the candidate just for the debates. What we observed of these rather stable elements would probably carry over into a presidency."[10] But they did not carry over into the 1980 presidential debate with Ronald Reagan. Why? One explanation could be the "incumbency factor."

Based upon an interpretation of a wide range of published and unpublished research on presidential debates, as well as upon an examination of the transcripts from the 1976 and 1980 presidential debates, this paper offers a preliminary analysis of the argumentative style of incumbents. The paper also speculates upon the causes and implications of the "incumbency factor."[11]

The Debating Style of Incumbents

Our analysis of the 1976 and 1980 presidential debates[12] suggests that an incumbent's debating displays three distinguishing characteristics: 1) failure to pursue extended debate; 2) a declarative style of arguing; and 3) a focus upon the status quo rather than a vision of the future. The effects of incumbency cannot, of course, be separated entirely from the influence exerted on a president's debating by the general campaign context and by his election strategy. Debate formats also can influence incumbents and challengers in different ways. Nonetheless, these three characteristics can be more closely tied to the incumbency factor than to the other direct influences on campaign debating.

Presidential incumbents tend to avoid extended debate with their opponents. A standard complaint against presidential debates is that the candidates do not debate each other. This alleged deficiency is largely a function of the debate format. In 1976, for example, Ford addressed 63% of his arguments to the panelists rather than directing them to Carter.[13] In the 1980 debate, with an improved format that restricted the role of the panelists, about 60% of the main points advanced by Reagan and Carter clashed with their opponent's.[14] But regardless of the format, the

incumbent failed to sustain the debate. He hit and ran, while the challenger pursued.

One content analysis of the 1980 debate revealed that Carter attacked Reagan 21 different times, and only refuted Reagan once. By contrast, Reagan attacked Carter 16 times and refuted Carter's attacks 15 times.[15] In a separate and independent content analysis of the 1980 debate other researchers revealed the same pattern: although 45% of Reagan's statements were critical of Carter, Carter used only 8% of his statements to defend himself. Reagan, on the other hand, devoted a much higher proportion (16%) of his statements to defensive comments.[16]

Outlines of Carter's and Reagan's speeches on each question posed to them in the 1980 debate illustrate the "hit and run" phenomenon of incumbent debating.[17] Table I displays their responses to Barbara Walter's two-part question on the Iranian hostage crisis and international terrorism. Carter and Reagan elected to answer different halves of the question in their initial statements (columns 1 and 2). When Carter had the opportunity to reply (column 3), he ignored Reagan's comments and restated his policy on terrorism. Reagan, however, used his reply (column 4) to respond to Carter's comments.

This characteristic was even more pronounced in the second half of the debate, where the format allowed more frequent rebuttals. Table II summarizes the responses to William Hillard's question concerning social security. As the challenger, Reagan consistently attacked Carter's policies and replied to Carter's attacks (see columns 1, 3, and 5). Carter, however, attacked Reagan without replying to Reagan's arguments. In his first speech (column 2) Carter attacked Reagan's policies and simply asserted that the social security system was sound. In his second speech

(column 4) Carter restated his attacks, but did not reply to Reagan's intervening speech. Moreover, Carter quickly shifted away from the topic of social security and attacked Reagan's policies on health care. In this third speech (column 6) Carter ignored Reagan's defense of his health care record, shifting instead to a general appeal to the principles of the Democratic Party versus those of the Republican Party.

To use a pugilistic metaphor, Carter jabbed and backed away, while Reagan pursued him around the ring, deliberately countering each different blow thrown by the incumbent. As a challenger in 1976, Carter commanded a wide repertoire of argumentative weapons, but as an incumbent he was largely restricted to one type of punch: the assertion.

Incumbents employ a declarative style of debating. In both the 1976 and 1980 debates incumbents tended to assert rather than justify. Bitzer and Rueter report that in 1976 the incumbent Gerald Ford was strikingly deficient in the basic building blocks of campaign argument—the "commonplace." A commonplace is a stock argument on a particular issue used repeatedly throughout the campaign. In the three Carter-Ford debates the challenger (Carter) used roughly twice as many commonplaces as the incumbent.[18] The challenger could support his assertions with well-rehearsed justifications, but the incumbent did not--he typically declared his assertions.

Ford's taste for asserting rather than arguing was reflected in all three of his debates with Jimmy Carter. In the first debate, for example, he responded to a question on amnesty for draft evaders by declaring: "I do not agree with that [Carter's] point of view. I gave, in September of 1974, an opportunity for all draft evaders, all deserters, to come in

voluntarily. . . . I think we gave them a good opportunity--we're--I don't think we should go any further." In the second debate Ford unilaterally declared the liberation of Eastern Europe: "In the case of [the] Helsinki [Agreement], thirty-five nations signed an agreement . . . but I can't under any circumstances believe that . . . by signing that agreement that the thirty-five nations have turned over to the Warsaw Pact nations the domination of uh--Eastern Europe. It just isn't true. . . . There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and there never will be under a Ford administration." In the final debate, Ford summarily declared victory over domestic problems: "I believe we can meet the problems within the cities of this country and still, uh--give a tax reduction. . . . [I believe] that we will reduce unemployment, that we will continue to win the battle against inflation, and at the same time give the kind of quality of life that I believe is possible in America. . . . These things can be done if we have the right vision and the right restraint and the right leadership." [19]

Analyses of the entire 1980 debate in terms of three types of statements (assertion, evidence, or analysis) reveal the declarative nature of the incumbent's debating. Statements of analysis are defined as statements that provide explanations or reasons; statements of evidence provide support; assertions declare a claim without evidence or analysis.[20] Almost 75% of Carter's statements in the 1980 debate were assertions rather than evidence or analysis. A similar study reported that only a third of the incumbent's remarks could be classified as analytical, while almost 45% of Reagan's statements involved one type of analysis or another.[21]

In 1980 Carter was no less prone to assert claims than Ford had been in 1976. During the first half of the debate, for instance, Carter responded to a question on inflation with a series of ringing (but

unsupported) assertions: "So, our proposals are very sound and very carefully considered to stimulate jobs, to improve the industrial complex of this country, to create tools for American workers, and at the same time would be anti-inflationary in nature." In the second half of the debate, he flatly declared: "As long as there is a Democratic president in the White House, we will have a strong and viable Social Security system, free of the threat of bankruptcy."[22]

Incumbents focus on the status quo to the neglect of the future. In the 1976 and 1980 debates incumbent presidents devoted their remarks to "reality images." Dan DeStephen defines "reality images" as statements which stress accomplishments of the president's administration, including programs initiated, departments restructured, policies instituted, and so forth.[23] In his closing remarks during the first presidential debate of 1976, Ford candidly summarized his own argumentative strategy as an incumbent: "I think the real issue in this campaign, and that which you must decide on November second, is whether you should vote for his promise or my performance in two years in the White House."[24]

In 1980 Carter adopted a similar debate strategy. He used both of his speeches on the question concerning the Iranian hostage crisis to report his administration's efforts to combat terrorism: preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to terrorist organizations, instituting international sanctions against hijacking commercial airplanes, and blocking recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization (see Table I).

Absent from both Carter's 1980 remarks and Ford's in 1976 were visionary statements about the candidates' hopes for the future of America. As the challenger in 1976, Carter had spoken of how America

should again become "a beacon for nations who search for peace and who search for freedom, who search for basic human rights."[25] Speaking in the wake of Watergate, Carter promised: "I believe that we can bind our wounds. I believe that we can work together. And I believe that . . . we can once again have a government as good as our people, and let the world know . . . that we still live in the greatest and strongest and the best country on earth."[26]

Speaking as an incumbent in 1980, Carter seemed unable to recapture his visionary rhetoric. Carter's "reality images" as an incumbent were best captured in a single sentence from his final speech in the 1980 debate: "I have seen the strength of my nation and I have seen the crises that it approached in a tentative way, and I have had to deal with those crises as best I could."[27] Since Carter was skillful in the use of value images in 1976, we may infer that the conspicuous absence of such images in his debating in 1980 suggests a natural tendency for incumbents to immerse themselves in the details of governing and to neglect addressing the hopes and aspirations of the electorate.

Causes of the Incumbents' Debate Style

Our analysis suggests that incumbents' debating manifests these qualities because the debate topics focus on their records, because incumbents labor to capitalize on their "presidential" status, and because presidents have acquired a taste for arguing from their own authority.

The questions posed by debate panelists contain implicit debate propositions that focus the debate on the incumbents' records. Past studies have placed considerable importance on the influence of hostile

questions to one candidate or the other. In their careful study of the behavior of panelists in the 1976 debates, Bitzer and Rueter cited hostile questions as a major factor influencing Ford's poor performance.[28] In 1980 the questions were much less hostile. Panelists did intrude into some of the controversies between the candidates in the 1980 debate, but they tended to be equally unfair to each candidate. For instance, after both Carter and Reagan had responded to her question on Iran and terrorism, Barbara Walters gratuitously remarked to the over 100 million viewers that "neither candidate answered specifically the question . . . ."[29] Despite the lack of obvious favoritism on the part of panelists, the incumbent faced a subtle—and perhaps inevitable—problem: the majority of questions invited a critique of his record.

Campaign debates are sponsored to provide an alternative to "image" politics; debate panelists feel obliged to address "issues." As a result, they naturally turn to the status quo and the policies presently in place. Each of the eight major questions posed in the Reagan-Carter debate was based upon an implicit proposition, and the vast majority of those propositions focused the debate on alleged inadequacies or failures of the incumbent administration.

The implied debate proposition in a panelist's question can be identified by examining the preface to the question, the direct queries with which the panelist concluded his/her remarks, and what the candidates themselves choose to say. The object of this analysis is to cast the proposition so as to capture the central issue addressed by the candidates and the panelist.[30] For example, William Hilliard, Assistant Managing Editor of the Portland Oregonian posed the third question in the second half of the Reagan-Carter debate by stating:

> Governor Reagan, wage earners in this country, especially the young, are supporting a Social Security system that continues to affect their income drastically. The system is fostering a struggle between the young and the old and is drifting the country toward a polarization of these two groups. How much longer can the young wage earner expect to bear the ever increasing burden of the Social Security system?[31]

Obviously, neither the panelist nor the candidates believed that this question asked for a specified number of months or years that young wage earners could expect to bear the burden of high social security taxes. By using the procedure outlined above, Hilliard's wide-ranging comment and his mis-directed question became: "Resolved, that the Present Social Security System Should be Re-Structured." Because Carter had been in office nearly three years, a critique of social security was at least indirectly a critique of Carter for failing to solve that problem.

Of the eight major questions posed by panelists in the Carter-Reagan debate, only one question contained an implicit proposition that failed to place the burden of defending the status quo upon the incumbent. The first questions in both halves of the debate implied the proposition that the U.S. military was inadequate. The proposition from the second question in part one of the debate focused upon high rates of inflation; the third question pointed to the intractable problem of urban decay, while the fourth question raised a proposition which questioned the adequacy of Carter's handling of the Iranian hostage crisis and raised the issue of terrorism generally.

The incumbent hardly fared better in the second half of the 1980

debate, as those questions critiqued energy and environmental policies and the social security system. Only the proposition implied in the final question left the incumbent free to attack his opponent: "Resolved, that the American Public Should Not Vote for my Opponent."

The point is not that the questions were biased, but rather that implicit or explicit debate propositions on issues of public policy will necessarily invite the debate to begin with a critique of the status quo. Since the incumbent can rarely escape accountability for the past four years, it is hardly surprising that he debates about the present and neglects the future. What is surprising is that incumbents have made little effort to turn the debate toward the future.[32] Perhaps this is because incumbents believe that a defense of their record is essential to maintaining their "presidential" image.

Incumbents deliberately stress their presidential ethos in campaign debates. The calculated efforts by the incumbent to emphasize his office take a number of forms. Incumbents at all electoral levels tend to refer to their debate opponents by title and name (as in "Governor Reagan"). Martel points out that incumbents hope the repetition of the opponents' lesser title will remind the audience of their own higher ranks.[33] Since Martel is a debate consultant to Republican candidates, he was not in a position to know Carter's motives in 1980, but the incumbent consistently followed this practice. In the 90-minute debate with Reagan, Carter invoked "the presidency" 27 times; he mentioned the "Oval Office" 10 times; and he spoke of "lonely, life and death decisions" 7 times.[34]

Carter devoted about a fourth of his closing statement to the theme of serving as a lonely, solitary leader: ". . . since I have been in office,

there have been six or eight areas of combat evolved in other parts of the world. In each case, I alone have had to determine the interest of my country. . . . I have done that with moderation, with care, with thoughtfulness. . . . The final judgment about the future of our nation, war, peace, involvement, reticence, thoughtfulness, care, consideration, concern, has to be made by the man in the Oval Office. It is a lonely job. . . ."[35]

The fundamental difficulty of cloaking oneself in the office of the presidency is the inherent conflict of that persona with a debate. The sense of authority central to this campaign strategy militates against genuine debate. It encourages the incumbent to avoid extended debate with his opponent, invites an imperious mode of arguing, and suggests that only the incumbent can properly interpret the status quo. After three and a half years in office, the presidential ethos not only becomes comfortable to an incumbent, but also encourages his tendency to argue from authority.

Presidential incumbents seem unwilling, or perhaps unable, to alter their habit of arguing from authority even when confronted with an opponent in a televised debate. As leader of the most powerful nation in the free world, a President quickly learns that the presidential ethos allows him to argue from the basis of his institutional and personal authority. A presidential debate, however, requires more sophisticated argumentation. It usually means that a single opponent will be given equal time to refute the President in a series of alternating speeches. In the British parliamentary system, a prime minister routinely must defend his or her administration under somewhat similar conditions. By contrast, the President of the United States typically appears before the Congress only

on ceremonial occasions, such as the State of the Union Address.

Perhaps the closest parallel to debate in a president's communication activities is the press conference, which maintains at least the appearance of an adversarial relationship.[36] In a press conference, however, only the president is allowed to make sustained statements. He has no single adversary. Even a collection of hostile press correspondents can do no more than pose questions.

An incumbent's campaign speaking also fails to prepare him for a presidential debate. Capitalizing on his status as the nation's leader, the incumbent often finds it convenient to adopt the "Rose Garden" strategy of refraining from active campaigning and staging media events at the White House. When Ford and Carter employed this strategy in 1976 and 1980 respectively, they deprived themselves of opportunities to develop a repertoire of effective campaign arguments, to test rationales for policies, and to practice arguing in public.

Moreover, when the incumbent finally does venture out on the campaign trail, he often prefers a media event staged in front of a friendly audience. In 1980 Carter revived a "Town Meeting" format, which he had employed in the early months of his administration. Here he spoke as the President answering the largely deferential questions of ordinary citizens.[37] Unlike the situation that Carter later faced in the debate with Reagan, an individual citizen rising to ask a question in these forums had neither the opportunity nor intention to refute the President.

Finally, incumbents have failed to prepare adequately for presidential debates. The "debategate" controversy of 1983 has made the public aware that incumbents develop extensive written material for their debates. But they do little to develop their debating skills. Perhaps because of the

demands of their office, incumbents tend not to practice rigorously for debates. Without such practice, incumbents can easily fall back into their habitual pattern of arguing from authority once a televised debate begins.

In 1976 Ford practiced answering questions as preparation for his first debate with Carter, but he had no opponent in those rehearsals. Satisfied with his performance in the first debate, he spent less time preparing for the second and third debates, which by most accounts he lost.[38] Even when incumbents have practiced debating, they are not severely challenged. Journalists Jack Germond and Jules Witcover quote a Ford aide as saying that the incumbent was treated too deferentially in practice sessions: "They [staff aides] would ask tough and even impudent questions, but when Ford answered them in less than the effective way, nobody would tell him so. . . . 'If his answer was off target, nobody seemed to want to say so.'"[39]

In 1980 Carter devoted most of his preparation time to studying his briefing books, but did engage in a few practice debates at Camp David and at his hotel in Cleveland, the site of the debate. Those practice sessions (with political scientist Samuel Popkin playing the role of Reagan) paled in comparison to Reagan's extensive practice debates. In Reagan's rehearsals David Stockman played the opponent, taunting and hectoring Reagan about inconsistencies and errors in his speeches.[40] In any event, Carter's debate practice sessions were no match for the challenger's experience in five other televised debates. While Carter had clung to the Rose Garden path, Reagan had debated in Republican primary forums in New Hampshire, South Carolina, Illinois, and Texas, as well as in a general election encounter with John Anderson.

Conclusions and Implications

Taken together, the characteristics of the incumbents' argumentation in 1976 and 1980 describe ineffective debating: failure to actively pursue an opponent, failure to present well-developed justifications for policies, and issuing short statements backed only with a ring of authority. Ironically, some incumbents have known that effective debating requires well-developed arguments. During the first debate in 1976, Ford's polling firm provided a group of viewers in Spokane, Washington, with equipment that allowed them to give "instant responses" during the debate. Responding from their homes as they watched the progress of the debate, these voters provided evidence that well-developed arguments were most persuasive. Richard B. Cheney, White House chief of staff under Ford, explains: "The instant response analysis clearly demonstrated that the President had the greatest impact on those leaning toward Carter when he took the time to explain his position on an issue and his reasons for holding that view. A fairly lengthy answer moved the 'Carter leaners' a significant distance toward a pro-Ford response, but brief answers did not provide sufficient explanations to overcome their bias."[41]

Incumbency, however, is just one factor influencing the debate behavior of a President. The campaign context and strategies, the debate format, and especially the abilities and personal mode of arguing of a particular candidate remain important variables. For example, Carter's personal tendency to engage in hyperbole, which was evident in the 1976 debates,[42] continued when he debated as an incumbent in 1980. Reagan, however, proved to be a more facile opponent than Ford. When Carter launched his "hit and run" attacks on Reagan, the challenger called the

audience's attention to Carter's habit of exaggeration with the simple phrase: "There you go again."[43]

Why is the normal argumentative style of incumbents less than effective in a presidential debate? There are at least three reasons: First, debating calls for well-developed arguments rather than a series of assertions backed with the ethos of the presidency. Second, much of the public appeal of a campaign debate is rooted in its conflict. An incumbent who hits and runs, who evades direct debate, is unlikely to delight the viewers. Third, debates involving an incumbent are likely to center on his past record rather than his vision of the future. Perhaps the most difficult problem for an incumbent centers upon the natural tendency of campaign debates to focus on the status quo. Here a President confronts his own version of "Catch-22": if his record had been above criticism, he probably would have been able to avoid a debate. Having been forced into a debate, he must argue on the ground where he is weakest.

One conclusion is clear: incumbents need to find ways to overcome these deficiencies in their argumentation. When incumbents debate, they must take into account the differences between the debating styles of incumbents and challengers and be careful to manage the argumentative burdens of their office. Incumbents who fail to make such adjustments will run the risk of sharing the fate of Gerald Ford in 1976 and Jimmy Carter in 1980.

NOTES

[1]Tom Wicker, "In the Nation: Negative on Debates," New York Times, 8 June 1980, p. 19E.

[2]Richard Nixon, remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors quoted in USA Today, 10 May 1984, p. 11A.

[3]Lloyd Bitzer and Theodore Rueter, Carter vs. Ford: The Counterfeit Debates of 1976 (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1980).

[4]Myles Martel, Political Campaign Debates: Images, Strategies, and Tactics (New York: Longman, 1983).

[5]William Adams, "Review of The Great Debates: Carter vs. Ford, 1976, ed. by Sidney Kraus; The Presidential Debates: Media, Electoral, and Policy Perspectives, ed. by George F. Bishop, et al.; and The Past and Future of Presidential Debates, ed. Austin Ranney," in Presidential Studies Quarterly, 10 (1980), 266.

[6]For summaries of the research on debate effects (learning, persuasion, image changes), see Steven H. Chaffee and Jack Dennis, "Presidential Debates: An Empirical Assessment," in The Past and Future of Presidential Debates, ed. Austin Ranney (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1979), pp. 75-106; Steven H. Chaffee, "Presidential Debates: Are They Helpful to Voters?" Communication Monographs, 45 (1978), 330-346; and Steven H. Chaffee, "Approaches of U.S. Scholars to the Study of Televised Political Debates," Political Communication Review, 4 (1979), 19-33.

[7]See Martel, Political Campaign Debates, especially pp. 57-115.

[8]See J. Jeffrey Auer, "The Counterfeit Debates," in The Great Debates: Background, Perspective, Effects (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 142-151; Susan A. Hellweg and Steven L. Phillips, "Form and Substance: A Comparative Analysis of Five Formats Used in the 1980 Presidential Debates," in The 1980 Presidential Debates, ed. Kurt Ritter (Special Issue of Speaker and Gavel, Vol. 18, 1981), pp. 67-76; and Bitzer, Carter vs. Ford, especially pp. 193-224.

[9]See especially, Bitzer, Carter vs. Ford, pp. 78-192.

[10]Bitzer, Carter vs. Ford, p. 185.

[11]Speculation upon the future of presidential debates, including the question of whether incumbents will continue to debate, is beyond the scope of this paper. The authors believe that such debates will occur. For our rationale, see Kurt W. Ritter, "Introduction: An Inaugural Issue on Presidential Debates," in The 1980 Presidential Debates, pp. 12-13.

[12]This study is limited to the three Ford-Carter debates in 1976 and the Reagan-Carter debate of 1980. We have not regarded Nixon as an

"incumbent" in his 1960 debate with Kennedy because a Vice President simply does not share the advantages and burdens of an incumbent President. Similarly, we have not included campaign debates in elections for lower offices such as U.S. Senator or Representative. As Martel points out, incumbents in those offices often debate so as to appeal to the interests of their local constitutents and they employ a variety of appeals unavailable to the presidential candidate. See Martel, Political Campaign Debates, pp. 68-72.

[13]Bitzer, Carter vs. Ford, p. 118.

[14]Donald Govang, Kurt Ritter, and Charles Griffin, "Reagan vs. Carter: A Progress Report on a Content Analysis of the 'Main Points' in the 1980 Presidential Debates," presented to the Fall Conference on Rhetoric and Public Address (Southern Speech Communication Association and Central States Speech Association), Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee, Oct. 7-9, 1981.

[15]Robert K. Tiemens, Susan A. Hellweg, Philip Kipper, and Steven L. Phillips, "An Integrative Verbal and Visual Analysis of the Carter-Reagan Debate," presented to the Speech Communication Association, Anaheim, California, Nov. 13, 1981.

[16]Patricia Riley and Thomas A. Hollihan, "The 1980 Presidential Debates: A Content Analysis of the Issues and Arguments," in The 1980 Presidential Debates, pp. 54-55.

[17]Tables I and II were created by the first-listed author of the present paper (Ritter) in collaboration with Donald Govang and Charles Griffin as part of a related research project. They are used in this paper with the permission of Mr. Govang and Dr. Griffin.

[18]Bitzer, Carter vs. Ford, pp. 132-135.

[19]"The First Carter-Ford Debate" (p. 459), "The Second Debate" (pp. 481-82), and "The Third Presidential Debate" (p. 520) in The Great Debates: Carter vs. Ford, 1976, ed. Sidney Kraus (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979).

[20]Riley and Hollihan, "The 1980 Presidential Debates," p. 54.

[21]Diana B. Prentice, Janet K. Larson, and Matthew J. Sobnosky, "The Carter-Reagan Debate: The Impact of the Debate Format on the Candidates' Responsiveness and Clash," presented to the Speech Communication Association, Anaheim, California, Nov. 15, 1981.

[22]"Debate Between President Jimmy Carter and Governor Ronald Reagan," Oct. 28, 1980, Transcript from the League of Women Voters, 1980, pp. 12 and 44.

[23]Dan DeStephen, "Value Images in Presidential Debates: A Comparative Study of 1976 and 1980," unpublished paper, Dept. of Speech, Iowa State Univ., 1982.

[24]"The First Ford-Carter Debate," p. 475.

[25]"The Second Debate," p. 496.

[26]"The First Ford-Carter Debate," p. 474.

[27]"Debate Between President Jimmy Carter and Governor Ronald Reagan," p. 57.

[28]Bitzer, Carter vs. Ford, pp. 116-117, 127-132.

[29]"Debate Between President Jimmy Carter and Governor Ronald Reagan," p. 29.

[30]This procedure is presented and explained in Govang, Ritter, and Griffin, "Reagan vs. Carter."

[31]"Debate Between President Jimmy Carter and Governor Ronald Reagan," p. 42. Consistent with the debate format, Hilliard posed the identical question to Carter (p. 44).

[32]It should be noted that in addition to defending his record Jimmy Carter also used these propositions as vehicles for arguing that whatever the inadequacies of his administration had been, he was better able to deal with these problems than was Reagan. Hence, as an incumbent, Carter avoided the defensive posture that plagued Ford in the 1976 debates. But he shared with Ford a failure to direct the debate toward a vision of the future for America.

[33]Martel, Political Campaign Debates, p. 97.

[34]See Steven Brydon, "The Two Faces of Jimmy Carter: The Transformation of a Presidential Debater, 1976 and 1980," presented to the Western Speech Communication Association, San Jose, California, Feb. 14-17, 1981.

[35]"Debate Between President Jimmy Carter and Governor Ronald Reagan," p. 58.

[36]The popular notion of an adversarial relationship between the President and the press, which was emphasized during Watergate and the Vietnam War, masks the basically cooperative element in the relationship which is rooted in the reality that the press and the President each need the goodwill and assistance of the other party. See Michael Baruch Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar, Portraying the President: The White House and the News Media (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981).

[37]Between Sept. 2 and Oct. 25, 1980, Carter held ten "Town Meetings" in eight states ranging from California to New York.

[38]Richard B. Cheney, "The 1976 Presidential Debates: A Republican Perspective," in The Past and Future of Presidential Debates, p. 120.

[39]Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover, "Presidential Debates: An Overview," in The Past and Future of Presidential Debates, p. 194.

[40]Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, Blue Smoke and Mirrors: How Reagan Won and Why Carter Lost the Election of 1980 (New York: Viking Press, 1981), pp. 277-78; and Myles Martel, "Debate Preparations in the Reagan Camp: An Insider's View," The 1980 Presidential Debates, esp. pp. 37-38, and pp. 41-42.

[41]Cheney, "The 1976 Presidential Debates," p. 122.

[42]See especially Bitzer and Rueter's comments upon Carter's "disturbing tendency toward overstatement" in the 1976 debates, which they regarded as "a hyperbolic quality that went beyond excusable stylistic embellishment and called his prudence into question." Carter vs. Ford, pp. 187-188.

[43]"Debate Between President Jimmy Carter and Governor Ronald Reagan," p. 46.

TABLE I

REAGAN-CARTER DEBATE: PART I, QUESTION 4 (BARBARA WALTERS, CORRESPONDENT, ABC NEWS)

RESOLVED: THAT IN LIGHT OF THE IRANIAN HOSTAGE CRISIS, THE U.S. SHOULD ESTABLISH NEW POLICIES FOR COMBATTING TERRORISM.

CARTER (Negative) Response to the Main Question and the Follow-up Question. Total: 3 min.	REAGAN (Affirmative) Response to the Main Question and the Follow-up Question. Total: 3 min.	CARTER Negative Rebuttal, 1 min.	REAGAN Affirmative Rebuttal, 1 min.
I. The Carter Administration (in concert with Western World leaders) is taking "strong action against terrorism." A. Airplane hijacking is included in this commitment. B. The U.S. must continue to "stand firm to control terrorism of all kinds."		I. The U.S. is committed to the following policies for combating terrorism: A. Western allies have agreed to stop all commercial air flights to any nation that protects plane hijackers/terrorists. B. The U.S. will not permit the spread of nuclear weapons "to a terrorist nation" or to any nation that does not already possess such weapons. C. The U.S. will not sell any weapons or materials to "a nation which is involved in terrorist activities." D. The U.S. will not deal with the P.L.O. until it recognizes Israel's right to exist.	I. Reagan has "no quarrel whatsoever" with such policies.
II. Terrorism is a serious problem; it is "one of the blights on the world." A. Violence has occured in France against Jews. B. The P.L.O. continues to attack Israelis.			II. It is "high time" to make clear that there is no room for terrorism in the world.
III. The most serious terrorist threat is a "radical nation" obtaining nuclear weapons. A. Carter and his predecessors have been committed to controlling nuclear proliferation to radical nations. B. This policy has continued despite the resistance from "some of our closest trade partners."			
IV. Reagan's policy on terrorism is inadequate and "very disturbing." A. Reagan has said that the spread of nuclear weapons is "none of our business." B. Reagan has said "there is nothing we can do" about Iraq getting such weapons.		IV. Reagan has not yet said "what he would do to stop or reduce terrorism in the future."	IV. [Reagan's Policy on Terrorism] A. A Reagan Administration would refuse to negotiate "with terrorists of any kind." B. Carter made a "misstatement of fact" in claiming that Reagan regards nuclear proliferation as "none of our business"; "I never made the statement."
V. The U.S. will maintain neutrality in the Iran-Iraq war. A. There are no plans to sell additional war materials to Iran. B. Delivery of items already purchased by Iran will only occur after the safe return of the hostages.			
	VI. Reagan has not publicly discussed his ideas for obtaining the release of the hostages because: A. To speak out on this issue might endanger present negotiations. B. Ideas might involve "quiet diplomacy, where you don't say in advance...what...you are thinking of doing," and this does not constitute a "secret plan."		
	VII. Once the hostages are released, there should be a complete Congressional investigation into Carter's handling of the Iranian crisis to determine: A. Why did the early diplomatic efforts fail? B. Why did it take so long to free the hostages? C. What "arrangements were" made "with Iran in order to obtain the release of the hostages?"		
	VIII. The U.S. has "been guilty of" not supporting an ally because "someone didn't meet exactly our standards of human rights." A. In a number of instances, the U.S. has not attempted "patiently to persuade" unpopular governments that favor the U.S. "to change their ways." B. The U.S. has aided in the establishment of revolutionary, totalitarian governments. C. Maintaining detente with the Soviet Union "where there are no human rights" is hypocritical.		
	IX. The U.S. failed to properly anticipate the Iranian hostage crisis. A. There was adequate warning that the U.S. Embassy was in danger. B. The U.S. should have strengthened security or removed personnel as other embassies did.		

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TABLE II

REAGAN-CARTER DEBATE: PART II, QUESTION 3 (WILLIAM HILLIARD, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, PORTLAND OREGONIAN)

RESOLVED: THAT THE PRESENT SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM SHOULD BE RE-STRUCTURED.

REAGAN (Affirmative), 2 min.	CARTER (Negative), 2 min.	REAGAN (Affirmative Rebuttal), 1:30 min.	CARTER (Negative Rebuttal), 1:30 min.	REAGAN (Affirmative Surrebuttal), 1 min.	CARTER (Negative Surrebuttal), 1 min.
I. The current Social Security system is fundamentally unsound. A. The Social Security system is based upon "a false premise" about the increase of workers relative to retirees. B. The Social Security system has become increasingly out of balance financially. 1. This has been evident for about 16 years. 2. "Now it is trillions of dollars out of balance." C. [Present solutions are merely stop-gap measures.] 1. The Social Security tax increase constitutes "the biggest single tax increase in our nation's history." 2. This tax increase is "a bandaid" which will only "postpone the day of reckoning by a few years at most."	I. The Social Security system is sound. A. As long as there is a Democratic president, Social Security will be sound. B. The serious threat to Social Security that existed when the Carter administration took office has been corrected.	I. It is "not true" that the Social Security system is on a sound basis. A. The imbalance in Social Security has been only temporarily offset. B. We cannot continue increasing Social Security taxes because young people are paying in more money than they will ever get out of the system.			
II. Reagan proposes that "a task force of experts" study the Social Security system and make recommendations for making it "actuarially sound," but: A. No current recipients will have "the rug pulled out from under them." B. Reagan believes "that the system can be put on a sound actuarial basis."	II. Reagan has advocated policies that would bankrupt Social Security. A. Despite having changed his position lately, Reagan has advocated a voluntary Social Security system which would bankrupt social security. B. A Reagan task force advocates reduction of inflation adjustments for Social Security recipients.	II. Reagan denies that he advocates a voluntary system that would bankrupt Social Security. A. Reagan only suggested that "the person who is paying in [Social Security] should be able to name his own beneficiaries" (example of orphan refused by his aunt). B. In addition, Reagan proposes to change Social Security regulations that discriminate against working wives.	II. Carter is committed to Social Security. A. He opposes taxing Social Security payments. B. He opposes any "promissory change" in Social Security payment standards. C. He supports the continuation of inflation indexing in Social Security payments.	II. "Something should be done about" Social Security disability checks going to people who have "all their needs and their care" provided by governments prisons and mental institutions.	
III. Presidential candidates must not "frighten" senior citizens with campaign rhetoric which raises the prospect of not getting their Social Security checks.	III. Reagan's Social Security policies "are very dangerous" to the "security, well-being and peace of mind" of those who are retired and who are "approaching retirement."	III. Reagan pledges himself "to a Social Security program that will reassure the senior citizens of ours they are going to continue to get their money."	III. "Those constant suggestions [by Reagan] that the basic Social Security system should be changed data cause concern and consternation among the aged of our country."		
			IV. [Carter supports health programs that Reagan opposes:] A. Medicare: 1. Medicare (like Social Security) is important to the elderly, but 2. Reagan "began his political career campaigning around this nation against Medicare." B. National Health Insurance: 1. Carter advocates a "national health insurance" program which will emphasize: a. Prevention of disease, b. Out-patient care, c. "Hospital cost containment," d. Catastrophic health insurance. 2. Reagan "again typically is against" national health insurance.	IV. Reagan did not oppose the principle of health care for the elderly. A. "There you go again" [Carter is misrepresenting Reagan's position.] B. Reagan opposed Medicare because he favored "another piece of legislation meeting the same problem."	IV. "There is a sharp, basic, historical difference between Gov. Reagan and me [Carter] on these crucial social welfare issues." A. The Democratic Party has promoted the welfare and "quality of life" of "working families" through its commitment to programs that the Republican Party has historically opposed: 1. Social Security, 2. Medicare, 3. National Health Insurance, 4. Minimum Wage, 5. Unemployment Compensation. B. Reagan quotes Democratic presidents, but when Republicans "get in office, they try to govern like Republicans."

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